

1.

A woman once knocked on my door, on a wet autumn's morning when the scent of the Earth was strong. She told me she could read my future, and would I want to know? My palm would guide her, she explained, with its lines that were really passages and straits, through the route that my life would take. (Ridges on my skin as avenues through time). I didn't believe her, no I didn't believe her, but I welcome her in, nonetheless.

She took my hand and inspected it carefully, following the flows of its streams and creases. You'll run from here one day, she said, you'll run away, somewhere far, far away. I suppressed a laugh and supplanted it with a smile, nodded politely, assumed: an obtuse prophecy!

(This was before)

This was before the library burned and was reduced to dust, before warnings cropped up like noxious weeds, everywhere, on fences and walls and trees, beware, snipers!

Many modes exist for divining the future, for forecasting its shifting climates: signposts in the sludge of coffee cups / image worlds in tea leaves / codes in dreams and nightmares. But where are the modes for reconfiguring the future, recarving its garbled course, banishing its wicked spirits?

Question: Why was the Oracle at Delphi called the 'navel of the world'?

Answer: A navel—a passageway from one world to the next, an anchor, a wormhole. The Delphic Oracle was indeed a navel in the sense that it was a cavity, a cleft, a crack in the earth, from whence fumes and plumes and vapours sputtered, inducing convulsing, ecstatic trances....

The Oracle, a navel. This is a metaphor I return to, time and time again.

2.

Charlotte Delbo called the Nazis 'furies,' while for Neruda, the fascists were jackals. Furies and fascists and jackals—and all other forms of mercenaries—descend on the city, stealing it under the cover of night. Its inhabitants awake to a new reality, and in the coming days, weeks, months, the city is smothered in silence. The telephone rings, piercing this muted—mutated—atmosphere.

"Fuck me, if I survive this, I'll write a finer tragedy than Tolstoy," the Doctor jokes.

(I pass him by on the street about a week later, sitting at a cafe, drinking his morning coffee. I couldn't take the hiding any longer, he tells me. When he's in the camp, I hear that he asks where I am—she had a big mouth, too, he says, either incredulous or pleased that I'm not there beside him).

I don't know who killed him, who called his name, who shot that final bullet. The murder/s could be walking the streets now, we could be greeting each other. I know he spent months in that camp, enclosed by wire, emaciated bodies, injured flesh. I heard he survived until the dawn of closure: Then guards rushed in—awakened the prisoners—commanded the Doctor step forth. His peers, whose wounds he'd sutured with whatever raw materials at his dispense (hair, usually), sensed his fate. And so they stood up and clapped, and clapped, and clapped....

“Stop that and go fuck yourselves!” were the last irreverent words he's rumoured to have said, as he passed through their corridor of bodies.

(He had always been a joker, obscene, the more shocking the better).

They exhumed the Doctor's remains from a mass grave about 15 years later—it was said he was identified by a single shred of fabric. Amidst the clutter of bones, there were remains that did not belong there—two men who had been killed in another war, a bigger war, five decades earlier. The only conclusion to draw is that somebody knew that place, knew that it was a good crevice for hiding human bodies.

They all remember the Doctor now in recurring memorial services—like clockwork they emerge to transform him into a symbol, a signifier, a vector for shared grief, into something other than himself.

Question: Will you go to the memorial service?

Answer: He'd turn in his grave if he knew how he was being remembered.